

**TO SURVIVE SENSIBLY  
OR TO COURT  
HEROIC DEATH:**

**Management  
of  
Guyana's  
Political  
Economy  
1965-85**

Tyrone Ferguson

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Georgetown, Cooperative Republic of Guyana  
1999

*Kadasi Ceres  
2003-11-28*

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Published in Guyana in 1999 by  
Public Affairs Consulting Enterprise

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ISBN 976-8160-66-7

"A people without a positive history is like a vehicle without an engine. Their  
emotions cannot be easily controlled and channelled in a recognizable direc-  
tion. They always live in the shadow of a more successful society."

By Steve Biko  
*I Write What I Like* (1978)

Typeset by H. Khan, Georgetown.  
Printed by Guyana National Printers Ltd.

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7. *The New Road*, p. 6.
8. *Guiana Graphic*, June 9, 1965.
9. *Guiana Graphic*, June 6, 1965.
10. *Ibid.* See also *The New Road*, p. 6.
11. Burnham, *Destiny to Mould*, p. 8.
12. *Guiana Graphic*, May 30, 1965.
13. *Guyana Graphic*, July 14, 1966.
14. For a discussion of the 1966-72 Development Plan, see Kempe Hope, *Development Policy in Guyana: Planning, Finance and Administration*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1979.
15. Lance J. Brotherson, "The Failure of Guyana's First Development Plan, 1966-72", *Transition*, No.8, 1983, p. 71.
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18. *The Great Advance in Infrastructure Development under the P.N.C. Government* - Address by Desmond Hoyte, Minister of Works and Communications at the 16th Annual Congress of the People's National Congress at Queen's College, May 2-10, 1973, p. 1.
19. Jagan, *The West on Trial*, p. 370.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
21. Payer, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
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24. "RMB Bill passed - PPP boycotts final session", *Guiana Graphic*, May 23, 1965.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. "Burnham rejects request to reorganise the RPA", *Guiana Graphic*, April 5, 1965.
28. *News from Guyana*, No. 26/1968.
29. Burnham, *Destiny to Mould*, pp. 152-3.
30. Jagan, *The West on Trial*, p. 364.
31. Clive Thomas, "Black Exploitation in the Caribbean" in Orde Coombs, *Is Massa Day Dead?*, p. 134.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Burnham, *Destiny to Mould*, p. 157.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
37. "Address by the Hon. Dr. P.A. Reid, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, at the Meeting of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Monetary Fund, October 3, 1969", *Guyana Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 3, December 1969, p. 88.

## Chapter 4

Foreign Policy in the Phase of Transition: 1965-69

### Introduction

In May 1966, the infant nation, Guyana, emerged on the international stage, bereft of either significant historical experience or tradition of diplomacy. While, moreover, the rudiments of a diplomatic infrastructure had started to be built in the immediate pre-independence years under the colonial administration, the task of implanting the institutional resources to allow it to operate with credible effectiveness in the foreign arena was necessarily the ultimate responsibility of the government of an independent Guyana. As a result of the specific circumstances into which the new nation was born, the task was undoubtedly one of the highest priority.

Critically, also, there was the issue of the stark resource constraints - material, financial and human - that severely restricted the extent of the outlays that could at the time have been provided to the fledgling institution of national diplomacy. Together, these factors served as the limiting parameters at the operational level that, for all practical purposes, determined that the earliest years of nationhood would be years of diplomatic transition. In other words, these years represented an essential learning period in the art and practice of diplomacy.

At another crucial level, that is, the level of the actual early experiences of relations with other nations, Guyana's situation was clearly unenviable. In this regard, two realities were especially pertinent. First, there was the issue of the interventionist proclivity of the Western Hemisphere's major power, the USA, in this period.<sup>1</sup> Guyana had itself experienced at first hand indirect US intervention in the early 1960s and had also seen persistent American intervention in Cuba during this period, as well as its military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, to name a few such instances. The US practice of intervention aimed at preventing the coming into power of communist or leftist governments or to overturn any such government. It provided vital lessons to the young nation about its room for manoeuvre in the specific global and regional contexts within which it was required to operate. The second critical reality related to the territorial claims against Guyana by the neighbouring countries of Venezuela and Suriname and, thus, the direct and dangerous threats that they posed to national survival.

These two circumstances also signified limiting boundaries for the craft-



ing of diplomacy in the early post-independence years. At the same time, however, the serious threats to the territorial patrimony were to dictate for Guyana the imperative of developing an extremely skilled diplomacy in the shortest possible time if it were effectively to confront these clear dangers to its security and survival within the inherited borders.

### Determinants of foreign policy

The autonomous devising of any country's external policy responds to a mix of domestic and international factors that are identified by the relevant policy makers as being of transcending national concern. Put another way, it derives from an assessment of the key elements in the domestic and external environments that are vitally influential to the determination of the country's external behaviour. Foreign policy, in this perspective, is in the final analysis contextual.

From the vantage-point of an infant nation, the additional consideration of its lack of experience, diplomatic traditions and practices, as well as the matter of resource constraints, also represents a determining input in the crafting of foreign policy. In such a situation, ideally the first order of business is to use the early years as a learning period in the art and conduct of diplomacy, if the accompanying circumstances so permit. Where circumstances dictate otherwise, as was clearly the case with Guyana in the immediate post-independence period, the need is at once to hasten the diplomatic learning curve, even as the nation judiciously eschews adventurous diplomacy.

It is clear that Guyana's diplomatic leadership was sensibly attuned to this reality. Before looking, however, at how they articulated their deep sensitivity in this regard, it is interesting to note who these leaders were at the time. Following its coming into office in December 1964, the coalition government had given general responsibility for external affairs to Minister without Portfolio, Deoroo Maraj, although Burnham himself was manifestly in charge of the country's diplomacy. In anticipation of Guyana's independence, and thus assumption of unfettered control over its external relationships, Burnham formally took over this responsibility in January 1966. He was soon thereafter to appoint Shridath Ramphal as Minister of State for External Affairs - in addition to his post as Attorney General. But, final responsibility for the country's diplomacy remained with Burnham, who had substantive Ministerial charge for these matters.

In other words, Guyana had the fortunate circumstance of having two major Cabinet figures, including the Prime Minister, to handle its external relations. This factor in itself attests to the national priority that Burnham

accorded to foreign policy issues in the peculiar circumstances in which the new nation was born. Apart from his evident intellectual attainments, Ramphal brought to the job a measure of international experience, in fact, Caribbean experience, to be more precise. He had served in the regional bureaucracy of the short-lived West Indies Federation. He thus came with strong regional credentials, which pointed in one of the priority directions that Guyana's foreign policy had taken immediately on Burnham's assumption of office - that is, the pursuit of regional integration.

The earliest statements on foreign policy by these two key diplomatic figures are especially instructive and revealing in terms of their acute appreciation of the contextual parameters within which the country was required to operate. Burnham was absolutely clear-sighted in this position that: "...the government of Guyana accepts frankly and unapologetically the position that since our entry on to the international stage is less than twelve months old, there is a great deal which we have to learn, a great deal which we have to understand and a number of nuances which we have to know more about. Guyana does not propose to make itself the protagonist or advocate of one or other of the super power or blocs. Both super powers and blocs are armed with enough material force and wealth to look after their interest in cold and hot wars and both of them are armed with sufficiently brilliant and skilled advocates to have their cases presented according to their interests."<sup>2</sup> Not only was he signalling that Guyana was going to use the early moments of its functioning on the international stage as a learning period. Crucially, that period was also going to see a Guyana that was very careful in relation to East-West issues - a Guyana that would not get involved in issues that it had no influence over.<sup>3</sup> It should be pointed out that this was not an assessment that Burnham had recently reached. A perusal of his previous statements on international issues indicates that he had arrived at this conclusion much earlier.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Ramphal was quite explicit in expressing his keen awareness of the implications for a new nation of foreign policy making. As he put it in 1967: "In setting about this task we recognise that a nation's foreign policy in the truest sense can only emerge out of the experience of many years of responsibility for its foreign affairs. There are some, I know, who sometimes speak as if on the achievement of independence small countries like mine can, as we select our flag and national anthem, choose a foreign policy which we should immediately proclaim and to which the conduct of our foreign affairs should thereafter at all times conform. But...this notion is a naive and an oversimplification of international existence. A nation's foreign policy can only be hammered out on the anvil of experience amid the dust and heat of the busy workshop of international affairs."<sup>5</sup> These statements by Burnham and Ramphal portrayed an exceptionally thoughtful - to some extent hard-nosed - approach



to foreign policy making and practice. They provided the comfortable image of a diplomatic leadership that had seriously assessed the requirements for effective diplomacy, taking account of Guyana's situation domestically and the nature of its external environment. Moreover, the new leaders had obviously learnt the lessons of the immediate past and how easy it was for the pursuit of the nation-building process to become prey to, and victim of foreign policy and ideological adventurism.

In assessing Guyana's foreign policy behaviour, therefore, the essential starting-point derives from these clearly defined perspectives, as expressed by the diplomatic leadership. In other words, what was of primary importance is not what the priorities of other external actors were. Rather, particularly in the early period of diplomatic behaviour, it was how Guyana's leadership defined its policy, its emphases and its national interest concerns. Too often, radical theorising and critiques justifiably see Third World countries not as agents, but as passive participants in their own destiny. Yet, all too often also their behaviour is ironically assessed, not from the vantage-point of these nations' declared interests, but on the basis of what is seen as desirable behaviour in the context of powerful external actors and interest groups.

In the actual event, with regard to the material determinants of its foreign policy, Guyana had thrust upon it the primary interest of its territorial security in view of the Venezuelan and Surinamese territorial claims and a series of provocative actions undertaken by these countries. The direction of foreign policy was also responsive to the specific global environment into which independent Guyana emerged in 1966. The Cold War geo-strategic and ideological conflict determined the crafting of diplomatic responses for Guyana, bearing in mind its location in the Western Hemisphere, its prior entanglement in the bipolar contestation, and the resultant disastrous external intervention that contributed to the severe rupturing of the incipient nationalist struggle for independence.

The interplay of this unavoidable global conflict with the domestic ideological environment ensured that this issue was a primary strategic factor in the formulation of policy and conduct of Guyana's international behaviour. Moreover, the coalitional basis of the government, with the minor political party governed by ideological conservatism, would in itself have constrained foreign policy radicalism.

Crucially, the country's geographical location as a Caribbean nation, the common historical experiences and the identity of social-economic and political conditions with the English-speaking Caribbean countries played a central role with regard to the orientation and the place that regionalism would hold among Guyana's external priorities. The pre-independence sharp domestic divergences in relation to participation in the West Indies Federation of the

late 1950s had been played out in favour of the preference of the incumbent PPP government to stand aside from the regional initiative, as against Burnham's articulate advocacy of participation.

Post-independent Guyana, however, provided Burnham with the opportunity to give effect to his vision of the imperative of Caribbean regional integration, with Guyana as a necessary participant. The fact that Ramphal was also at the centre of diplomatic policy making reinforced this particular primary thrust of the emerging foreign policy. Finally, Guyana's own struggle for independence and the associated racial considerations served to locate the on-going liberation conflicts, especially on the African continent, at the topmost level of diplomatic interest.

#### Guyana between East and West

It was earlier posited that a nation's foreign policy is ultimately contextual, responding as it generally does to a combination of domestic and international imperatives. With respect to international factors, it is to be recalled that Guyana emerged on the global scene in an external context defined by the intense Cold War struggle that pitted the superpower rivals, the US and the USSR, in a bitter struggle for world dominance. New nations found themselves under tremendous pressure to side with one or the other superpower.

For countries in Latin America and the Caribbean - as well as those in Eastern Europe - the Cold War established even more constricting parameters for their external behaviour. This was so because, for these countries, the hovering geographic presence of the two superpowers was underpinned by their explicit articulation of a "sphere of influence" doctrine in these regions.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Latin American and Caribbean countries had to contend with the direct and self-imposed strategic oversight by the US of their domestic and external behaviour, even as the East European countries similarly experienced the Soviet Union's pervasive interventionist presence.

Some analysts, as well as domestic opposition politicians, have criticised what they have characterised as the pro-Western bias of Guyana's foreign policy in the early post-independence years. There were several bases for this criticism. First, on coming into office, the coalition government immediately cut-off trade relations with Cuba, which had been developed in the early 1960s by the PPP administration, and demonstrated a reluctance to have economic relations with the communist countries generally. Second, in this period, there was the glaring absence of diplomatic relations with the communist countries, as contrasted with the ready formalisation of diplomatic links with some of the major Western states. Third, critics pointed to a perceived pro-Western bias of



Guyana's voting record on a number of critical issues in the United Nations, including the China recognition issue, as well as, fourth, a marked silence on the prominent East-West issues of the period, including the Vietnam issue.

It is without question that, generally speaking, the states with which a particular country has diplomatic relations to some extent convey its substantive policy orientation. But such a generalisation is significantly less tenable in relation to a new nation. A combination of the lack of diplomatic traditions, inexperience and resource constraints tends to dictate a transitional learning period during which diplomatic contacts judiciously respond to the immediate national imperatives and are commensurate with resource availabilities. The sensible new nation just does not willy-nilly initiate diplomatic relations with all and sundry before it had wet its feet, so to speak, in the international currents.

As is evident from the data presented in Table 4.1, in the period 1966-69, Guyana's formal diplomatic links indicate the following tendencies. First, there was a focus on several major Western developed countries. Second, the immediate bordering countries were given prime diplomatic attention. Third, the English-speaking Caribbean countries were primary focuses as well, signifying an emphasis on regional diplomacy. Fourth, the small group of developing countries - India, Pakistan and Yugoslavia - indicates a responsiveness to the ethno-cultural heritage of the majority racial group in the country, with regard to the first two and, insofar as Yugoslavia was concerned, the non-aligned foundations of international policy.

It is quite easy to understand why Guyana took steps immediately on gaining its independence in 1966 to establish diplomatic relations with the major Western industrialised countries of the UK, USA and Canada. For a variety of reasons, these were the three countries with which Guyana had developed extensive traditional relations across a range of areas. They were the countries with which Guyana had formed dominant economic relations, as reflected in the pattern of external trade, aid and investment flows. Moreover, it was to these three countries that, over the years, there was a constant out-migration of large numbers of Guyanese, who formed settled migrant communities and who still maintained significant links to the homeland. And, third, political and cultural contacts and influences were the greatest with these three countries for Guyana, as manifested in such indices as external destinations for higher education and other forms of specialised training, entertainment, media influences and the like.

Regarding the non-traditional, Western industrialised countries - France, Italy, Japan and West Germany<sup>7</sup> - with which Guyana formalised diplomatic relations in the early post-independence years, the main consideration was obviously economic. More precisely, the central motivation was the potential

economic assistance and investment resources for the country's development effort that these important Western countries were in a position to provide. It is to be borne in mind that, as a poor developing country, Guyana needed significant external financial resources. It thus could not foreclose the main available sources of such resources.

**Table 4.1: Countries with which Guyana Established Diplomatic Relations: 1966-85**

YEAR	Countries
1966	India, Canada, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, United States, West Germany, Venezuela (8)
1967	Italy, France, Pakistan (3)
1968	Yugoslavia, Brazil (2)
1969	Barbados, Japan, South Korea (3)
1970	Netherlands, Guinea, Uganda, Nigeria, Haiti, Ethiopia, Dominican Republic, USSR, Colombia, Tanzania (10)
1971	Zambia, Belgium, Peru, Egypt (4)
1972	Cyprus, Bangladesh, PRC, Poland, GDR, Libya, Argentina, Cuba (8)
1973	Mexico, Panama, Austria, Australia, Turkey, Syria, Romania, Bahamas, Cambodia (9)
1974	Costa Rica, Ecuador, Sri Lanka, DPRK, New Zealand, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Liberia (8)
1975	Vietnam, Sweden, Hungary, Mozambique, Algeria, Botswana, Suriname (7)
1976	Malta, Malaysia, Czechoslovakia (3)
1977	Bulgaria, Switzerland, Angola (3)
1978	Dominica, Portugal (2)
1979	St. Lucia, Finland, Greece, Niger, Lesotho, Spain, St. Vincent, Denmark, Mongolia (9)
1980	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Zimbabwe (2)
1981	Nicaragua (1)
1982	-
1983	-
1984	-
1985	Albania (1)

Insofar as the ideology of development in this transitional period was explicitly receptive to external private investment sources and, as well, hinged on official sources of foreign financing, then these diplomatic relations are easily understandable. It should also be borne in mind that while Guyana became a



member of important international financial institutions such as the World Bank, it was precluded from membership of the regional development bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) because of its territorial problem with Venezuela. An important potential source of foreign financing was thus foreclosed to it. The new, poor developing nation has to carefully assess where it stood to gain the most in terms of external investment for the development task.

Finally, Guyana emerged into nationhood with the burden of an extremely serious territorial threat emanating from Venezuela. Its evolving security diplomacy called, at one level, for the broadest possible number of friendly countries to provide it with diplomatic support. It was also concerned to develop friendly relations with important countries which theoretically stood to extend both diplomatic and, critically, material support in the event of Venezuela's physical prosecution of its claim.

The situation in terms of diplomatic relations and other formal governmental contacts with the Communist countries was starkly different in the immediate post-independence period. In a historical sense, relations in this regard were virtually non-existent. It is instructive that the incipient, if modest trade and other exchanges that had been started by the PPP government of the early 1960s with Cuba and other socialist countries were immediately jeopardised as a result of decisions taken by Cuba with regard to the continuation of purchases of rice from Guyana and were decisively terminated by the incoming PNC-UF administration.<sup>8</sup>

To fully understand this behaviour, it is necessary to look at the domestic and external contexts of the pre-independence period, the situation in the newly independent Guyana, as well as occurrences in the early years of its independent functioning. Such an examination shows that Guyana really had no sensible option but to adopt a basically arms-length approach to the Communist countries.

In the first place, unlike the situation with some of the major Western nations, Guyana simply did not have a tradition of relations with the Communist group of countries. Moreover, the emergent initiatives of the pre-independent PPP Government, in the context of the harsh Cold War conflict of the times, provided its own lessons of the dangerous consequences for a Western Hemisphere country that sought to forge such relations. Another vital consideration was the fact that the Communist-oriented PPP, on the basis of its ideological loyalty and uncritical commitment to the Soviet ideological line, had built up strong links with other Communist governments, parties and groupings and thus had decided advantages in this area.

Against such a background, the PNC-dominated government was not assured of any advantages with regard to material and ideological support from

these countries, were formal relations to be established. In addition, the PNC's control of the government hinged at the time on its political relationship with the capitalist-oriented UF. There is no doubt that, from a purely political standpoint, any inclination toward the development of relations with the Communist countries would have jeopardised the survival of the coalition government - and thus the PNC's and Burnham's rule.

Looking at the situation from the external angle, that is, the calculation of the probable reactions of key powers and groups of countries, several factors clearly came into play in the decision process. First of all, there could be no doubt that formal relations between Guyana and the Communist countries would have drawn down the interventionist wrath of the US. The political foolhardiness of any such action had already been seen during the period of the PPP's governance in the 1950s, into the 1960s. Burnham had explicitly stated on numerous occasions that he was not interested in empty martyrdom, which would have set the country back years in terms of control of the national development process.

But the PPP's - and Jagan's - demise was not the only immediate example that the PNC-led government had. There were sufficient examples of the fate of other governments in the Western Hemisphere and beyond that even remotely manifested radical tendencies or what were perceived by the US as Communist sympathies. US clandestine intervention in 1954 had doomed the reformist Arbenz government in Guatemala. The year before Guyana's independence, 1965, the US had intervened militarily and decisively in the Dominican Republic. And there was the ongoing case of Cuba which faced unending US hostility and destabilisation for much of the 1960s.

In the aftermath of the 1965 US intervention in the Dominican Republic, President Johnson made it clear that the US was not going to sit idly by and see the growth of communism in the Western Hemisphere. As he put it: "...we don't propose to sit here in our rocking chairs with our hands folded and let the Communists set up any government in the Western Hemisphere".<sup>9</sup>

Second, ideological radicalism had distinct negative implications for the country's territorial survival. It would have been an exceedingly foolhardy and irresponsible government to incur the combined destabilising pressures of the US and Venezuela before it had moved to consolidate its nationhood.

At a time, moreover, when the desperate search for external friends in relation to the border threat, as well as the priority of economic regionalism was explicitly stated, a radical Guyana, a Guyana courting Communist friends, would have without question found itself isolated within the English-speaking Caribbean. The Caribbean independent countries were clearly pro-Western and distrustful of Communism and the Communist countries. For instance, Prime Minister Williams had left no doubt on where he stood on the issue of



communism in his address to his party's Annual Convention in October 1965. As he put it then: "Let me merely make one point crystal clear - no taint of Communism will ever be permitted in Trinidad and Tobago under the PNM.<sup>10</sup> The ruling JLP government in Jamaica was just as uncompromising on the issue of communism.

The opposition PPP repeatedly argued that the Communist nations were qualitatively different from the 'imperialist' US and that alignment with these countries would have provided the needed security umbrella in the face of external threats from Venezuela. This argument really had no substantive basis to it. In fact, the evidence was to the contrary.

The Soviet Union simply could not be trusted. It was soon to show that, in its behaviour and responses, it was not different from the US where its fundamental interests were involved. Its massive military intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 proved that Hungary in 1956 was no aberration, that like the US it rode roughshod over the smaller nations that fell within what it defined as its sphere of influence. This event was also to widen the gap between the PNC and PPP ideologically. Burnham's immediate response was an unreserved condemnation of the Soviet intervention, which he not only saw as "morally and legally indefensible", but as making "a mockery of the posturing by large nations about the rights of small nations to decide their own destinies and to be free from outside interference".<sup>11</sup>

Jagan was clearly faced with a major dilemma. His reaction stood in stark contrast to Burnham's as he unconvincingly attempted to justify the Soviet intervention thus:

...the PPP sees a clear distinction between imperialist intervention in the Dominican Republic...and Vietnam to uphold a system of capitalist-imperialist exploitation and oppression, and action undertaken in defending socialism...

...it seems that German militarism poses a new threat not only to the USSR and other socialist countries, but to the socialist system itself. And this, of necessity must have led the countries involved to give grave consideration to the step which was taken.<sup>12</sup>

Here was a national leader who had been the victim of superpower intervention from the US endorsing superpower intervention from the Soviet Union to overturn a government.

While, from his earliest statements in the 1950s, Burnham showed a precise understanding of the behaviour of the big powers towards small countries such as Guyana - that these small countries were ultimately expendable within the framework of the former's dominant strategic interests - it was almost four decades later that Jagan confessed that he and his party were wrong about the Soviet Union. As he stated it at his party's 24th Congress in 1991, during the

Cold War, "we tended to follow Soviet foreign policy; we remained silent even when we disagreed on some questions. We now recognise that position was wrong".<sup>13</sup>

This was one of the tragedies of Guyana's political economy. On an issue as divisive as this, where one leader, Burnham, was clear-sighted on it and repeatedly warned the other major nationalist leader to disavow allegiance to Soviet foreign policy directives, it had to take the collapse of the Soviet Union decades later to convince the latter. Had there been a meeting of minds much earlier, at least one serious area of political divergence, that contributed so much to their failure at national reconciliation, would not have been the key sticking-point that it proved to be.

But the question involved was far more fundamental than whether the USSR could have been trusted in the specific context facing Guyana. On the one hand, the Communist group was itself severely splintered following the Sino-Soviet split that developed in the early 1960s. On the other, there was the critical issue of the modality of their conduct of relations, with the premium placed on inter-party relations, even as official level, government-to-government relations were conducted. Inter-party relations provided the opportunity for intervention and the sponsorship of groups in opposition to the incumbent government.

Just as important was the issue of the doctrinal position of countries such as China and Cuba at the time and their articulated advocacy of revolutionary wars in the Third World - their commitment to and practice of the Marxist-Leninist position of revolutionary proletarian internationalism.<sup>14</sup> Border countries such as Venezuela and Brazil were deeply concerned about Cuba's role in the region and in their countries. The wider hemisphere was intolerant of Cuba's revolutionary interventionist activity. In such a climate, as Gill has pointedly argued:

To have maintained close relations with the Cuban Government in the circumstances would have been interpreted as an act of defiance on the part of the Guyana Government, a choice that was in no way rewarding, especially when account is taken of the position of Guyana's immediate continental neighbours...

For Burnham to have courted Castro, it would have meant that Guyana would have been viewed with suspicion by these two important neighbours, both struggling to eliminate a rash of guerrilla activity.<sup>15</sup> But, the story did not end there. As was earlier seen, the evidence was clear that Cuba was also intervening in Guyana, that it was providing military training to PPP cadres for purposes of subversion and sabotage.<sup>16</sup> In a quite perceptive analysis of the American intervention in 1965 in the Dominican Republic, Thompson had pointed to lessons to be drawn therefrom: "Firstly,



that living in the Western Hemisphere in the era of the Cold War, the intervention that we need to guard against is American while the subversion we must watch for will be Russian and/or Chinese financed and inspired - and possibly armed."<sup>17</sup>

Without question, these were considerations that determined the posture of the PNC to relations with the communist countries in the immediate post-independence period. It would have been politically suicidal for the PNC to seek in the circumstances to develop formal relations with them at this time.

This having been said, to see the PNC government as pro-Western is a wholly simplistic view of the matter. The evidence points to a situation of a relative nearness of position with the Western countries on certain issues in this transitional period, but certainly not a slavish adherence to the West. While the government was prudently not going to take positions that deliberately antagonised the US, it did not follow undeviatingly US positions on international issues. In fact, the isolation of one or two Cold War issues - for example, the China recognition question - as indicative of Guyana's diplomatic inclination does major disservice to the more complex nature of foreign policy.

An objective analysis of Guyana's foreign policy in this period conveys an exceedingly astute and thoughtful approach, attuned to the nation's primary interests, as defined by itself. When an examination is done of the early pronouncements by the key diplomatic leadership - and here the wide-ranging policy statements by Ramphal at the annual Sessions of the UN General Assembly can be used as the main benchmark - what emerges is the recurrence of certain thematic emphases. These related to (i) interrelated issues of security, the dilemma of the small state, territorial threats and the use of force; (ii) Guyana's particular concern with the distinct threat posed by Venezuela; (iii) issues of decolonisation and racial oppression and (iv) the economic development issue. The key East-West issues of the period were generally almost studiously ignored. It is evident that the Guyana government did not see an overriding interest in getting involved in the harsh controversies of the Cold War. They were not of vital significance when the country faced its own threats and insecurities. Foreign policy was centrally focused on these threats and insecurities.

Had Guyana taken a position in terms of its policy priorities that East-West issues were important to it, then it would have been quite valid to judge its diplomacy on that basis. Failing that, its foreign policy behaviour has to be judged on the basis of what were the most important foreign policy issues that it defined for itself rather than solely in relation to East-West issues that were of fundamental importance to the superpowers. When the situation is examined from this more balanced view, a vastly different interpretation emerges.

When, for instance, the US militarily intervened in the Dominican Re-

public in 1965, the position of the Burnham government was one of explicit criticism. Burnham stated that the intervention was unjustified.<sup>18</sup> It is true that other forces in Guyana, including the PPP, were more virulently critical of US intervention. But, the fact is that the government did not support the intervention, as did many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Sensible and objective analysis of the benchmark issue of Guyana's voting on the China representation issue in the UN suggests a far more studied position on this issue than mere pro-Westernism. It is true again that Guyana's voting record in 1966-69 was identical to the US position. But by 1969, there was a subtle evolution in its position on the issue. Burnham once again precisely stated Guyana's position in this regard, that is, a two-China position. He outlined the various factors that went into determining this position. First, on the eve of admission to the UN, Guyana had to be sensitive to the factor that Taiwan held a permanent seat on the Security Council. Its permanent membership status gave it a veto power over decisions of the Council. Equally important was Guyana's border problem with Venezuela and the probability of a Security Council role in this connection. Here again, an exposed and vulnerable country does not heedlessly court the hostility of important members of the international community.

Moreover, when an analysis is done of the issues of explicitly defined interest to Guyana - the priority concerns as determined by its leadership - the record is the exact opposite of pro-Westernism. In this regard, Guyana placed a priority on issues of decolonisation and racist exploitation. Its positions on issues such as Namibia, Rhodesia and South Africa were unequivocally different from that of the US in particular and the Western countries generally. This was reflected in its voting record and activism on these issues in the UN and its central participation in the United Nations Council for Namibia, starting in 1967.<sup>19</sup>

#### Guyana, the security dilemma and foreign policy making

With regard to its external relations, the critical urgency for the newly independent Guyana was the management of its relations with the bordering countries - Venezuela and Suriname. Both countries laid claim to significant portions of the territorial patrimony. However, for a variety of reasons, the Venezuelan claim represented the far more serious and potentially dangerous of the two.

It is instructive that Venezuela's raising of the territorial claim in the early 1960s occurred in the context of Guyana's nationalist struggle for independence and, more pointedly, the particular forms and directions that it had taken.



In this regard, the leading role of the PPP, as the governing party, and the radical ideological commitment of the PPP leadership to Marxism-Leninism undoubtedly played a vital part in Venezuela's decision to pursue its irredentist ambitions.<sup>20</sup>

What needs to be remembered was the fact that, at this very moment - in the early years of rebuilding a democratic polity following many years of dictatorial rule - Venezuela confronted a communist-based guerrilla insurgency. It should also be recalled that this insurgency was crucially supported by Cuba's explicit encouragement of, and the provision of material aid to such movements in the region. Venezuela in the 1960s was the prime target of opportunity for Cuba. The result was a marked deterioration of Venezuela-Cuba relations, which reached their nadir in 1961. In November of that year, diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed.

It is evident, therefore, that the Venezuelan authorities saw a communist Guyana on its borders as signifying an added security threat. It is also apparent in this respect that the US played a role in encouraging Venezuela's use of the territorial issue as a major form of pressure on Guyana. As Jagan himself has noted with respect to the reopening of the territorial claim by Venezuela at this moment: "Another reason was pressure by the US Government on the Venezuelan Government. The border issue was to be used as a possible means of intervention in an independent Guyana with a PPP Government."<sup>21</sup>

Thus it was that in 1961 the Betancourt government in Venezuela took the decision to raise the territorial claim and to pursue it vigorously before Guyana gained its independence from the UK. This decision was conveyed to the United Nations in early 1962 and catalysed a substantial new reality for Guyana.<sup>22</sup>

The resuscitation of the Venezuelan claim, therefore, arose under the PPP government. It was undeniably a serious threat that the coalition government inherited and was required to manage carefully to avert a major security disaster for the country.

Venezuela's territorial pretensions represented a significant external point of pressure on the radicalisation process in Guyana. From this perspective, the new leadership of independent Guyana was acutely sensitive to the danger posed to the very survival of the new state by the pursuit of a project of ideological adventurism before national cohesion had even been consolidated. Diplomatically a neophyte and unprepared, as well as militarily no match for Venezuela, Guyana in this moment of its infancy could thus not afford to provide Venezuela with the opportunity and the incentive to reinforce its insecurities and weaken its very viability.

In dealing with the Venezuelan threat, the calculation was that Guyana would have to depend almost exclusively on diplomacy at that time. What this

meant was that it did not have the luxury of time in the diplomatic learning process. It further meant that it needed to build up a reliable core of friendly countries, including influential countries, to which it could look for diplomatic support in the struggle with Venezuela.

To this end, the key influential countries were necessarily by definition the major Western powers with which it had developed traditional relations - the UK, US and Canada. Its English-speaking Caribbean neighbours, Commonwealth countries and the large group of African states figured prominently in Guyana's immediate diplomatic calculations in establishing a reliable core of friendly countries. This precocious diplomacy also saw the signal value of ensuring that the other major bordering country, Brazil, with its own regional security concerns and ambitions, served as a countervailing force vis-a-vis Venezuela.

While the territorial threat posed by Venezuela was evidently the more serious and immediate, the situation on the eastern border presented its own types of dangers as Guyana faced a set of probing provocations to its territorial sovereignty from Suriname, at the time still a Dutch colony. The period 1966-69 thus witnessed a series of border incidents that focused diplomatic priority on the security issue. Guyana was forced to battle on two security fronts virtually simultaneously in the earliest years of its independence. The threats were exceedingly severe and the ultimate survival of Guyana within the inherited territorial boundaries was going to hinge crucially on sober, imaginative and creative diplomacy on Guyana's part.

The period leading up to the achievement of independence by Guyana was not without its acute sense of immediate danger for the survival of the prospective new nation. At the same time, the events of the period presaged the diplomatic astuteness for which the country was to become known following the assumption of control of its external relations after independence.

What was to emerge as a pattern of pressure against Guyana by Venezuela had an early manifestation in July 1965 when that country placed an advertisement in the *Times* of London objecting to the grant by the Government of Guyana of oil exploration concessions to foreign petroleum companies in the territory under claim.<sup>23</sup> It was in this immediate pre-independence period, moreover, that Guyana had reinforced where its potential friends could be found and, conversely, where it should not look for reliable friends. During consideration by the UN Third Committee in December 1965 of a draft resolution on Guyana's independence, that attracted the sponsorship of the majority of African countries, twelve Latin American countries abstained in the voting because they failed to get the sponsors to include in it a reference to the border issue.<sup>24</sup>

In preparation for independence, the UK had agreed to hold talks on the



border problem with the Venezuelan government during 1965.<sup>25</sup> Burnham made clear from the inception that not only did his government not recognise the Venezuelan claim, but that it was firm in the position that not one inch of the country's territory was going to be yielded to Venezuela.<sup>26</sup>

These talks provided the opportunity for one of the earliest manifestations of Guyana's successful and skillful diplomacy. The diplomatic leadership played a decisive part in determining the parameters of the talks. First, despite its status as a colony, Burnham successfully insisted that Guyana's participation would not be as part of the British delegation, as the UK government evidently wanted, but as a distinct and separate interested party.<sup>27</sup> Second, Guyana explicitly stated that its involvement in no sense indicated a recognition of Venezuela's claim and, therefore, was not to be construed as entailing a renegotiation of boundaries; rather, all that it was prepared to do was to examine the border documents in accordance with the governing UN resolution. Third, Burnham himself was the leader of the Guyana delegation at the London talks. This act signified his active centrality in the emergent diplomacy of the country generally, but more specifically at the time in relation to the most threatening issue facing the new nation. It also had another well-calculated significance since the Venezuelan chief delegate, its Foreign Minister, was at all times junior in status to him, with all the consequences for the balance of negotiating advantage.

In fact, in a newspaper report out of London on the Guyana position, significantly entitled "Border Summit a Victory for PM", it was argued that the pre-London conference manoeuvrings represented a major diplomatic victory for Prime Minister Burnham. It was pointed out that Venezuela had wanted an agenda item that in essence would have meant a discussion of the merits of its claim. Guyana strongly rejected this position and the conference agenda ultimately reflected its preference. The report summed up the London talks as being held on "Burnham's terms".<sup>28</sup> The apparently unschooled and inexperienced diplomatic leadership was already proving that it was at least the equal of what Venezuela had to offer.

While the London talks ended in a stalemate, the parties agreed to reconvene in Geneva in February 1966. The preparatory Geneva process brought out another crucial feature of Burnham's handling of the border problem that was to distinguish the approach over the following difficult years. This was the conscious search for a unified national position on the matter. Apart from his constant briefing of the PPP leadership on developments, Burnham extended an invitation to the PPP to be part of the Guyana delegation. However, while it agreed in principle, the PPP's position was that it should have two delegates on the Guyana team. Since the government indicated that it was prepared to include only one PPP delegate - and in fact suggested Dr. Fenton

Ramsahoye, the former Attorney General under the previous PPP government, who would have previously dealt with the issue - this effort at a unified approach foundered on this critical divergence.<sup>29</sup> This was one of those unfortunate instances when the larger national purpose was subordinated to narrow considerations of partisan political advantage.

The Geneva negotiations resulted in agreement on how the border controversy was going to be handled over the period ahead. In substantive terms, the Geneva Agreement had several major features. First, it envisaged the establishment of a Mixed Commission of Guyanese and Venezuelan representatives "with the task of seeking satisfactory solutions for the practical settlement of the controversy" (Article I). Second, it stipulated that "[n]o new claim, or enlargement of an existing claim, to territorial sovereignty in those territories shall be asserted while this Agreement is in force, nor shall any claim whatsoever be asserted otherwise than in the Mixed Commission while that Commission is in being" (Article V). And, third, it gave to the mechanism of the Mixed Commission a life of four years to complete its mandate.

In terms of domestic reaction, the PPP expressed its opposition to the Geneva Agreement. Jagan deemed it a "sell-out" of the country's national interest and a "retreat from the 'not an inch' and 'not a blade of grass' position of the Guyana Government. It is *prima facie* recognition of a claim which is non-existent".<sup>30</sup> In fact, this was the only major discordant view among the array of domestic interest groups in the country.

Burnham's riposte was to locate the Geneva Agreement within the context of the "realities of international society". As he pointedly stated it during Parliament's debate on the Agreement:

The Opposition...has got to decide whether it wants a heroic death or a sensible survival. The Agreement represents a desire to survive sensibly.<sup>31</sup>

One cannot even say that Jagan's opposition was the mere posturing of an opposition politician without the responsibility of national office. In the 1950s and 1960s, when he held the reins of governmental leadership, he had displayed an extreme ideological approach divorced from the colonial status and capacities of the country and the "realities of international society", that not only jeopardised national stability and safety, but his own political fortunes. Burnham's practicality and acute sensitivity to Guyana's place in the overall scheme of international things realistically calculated what was in the nation's best interests at that precise historical conjuncture.

A convincing argument could be made that, absent the Geneva Agreement, Guyana faced the prospects of either, at best, a further postponement of independence or, at worst, a move by Venezuela to take over the claimed territory in a context of Guyana's unpreparedness, both militarily and diplomati-



cally to deal with such a situation. In rejecting the Geneva Agreement, Jagan had proposed that the government should seek the guarantee of the country's territorial integrity by the major powers, specifically the US, UK and USSR. Burnham's response to that proposal showed once again his more realistic grasp of the international situation - as he noted, the American and Soviet governments had their own understanding on "spheres of influence", as decisively demonstrated by the Soviet Union's withdrawal under US pressure of nuclear missiles, that it had installed in Cuba.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the realities of international society made highly unlikely any such guarantee.

The Geneva Agreement notwithstanding, in each of the years between 1966 and 1969, Venezuela undertook acts that sought to destabilise Guyana and that were in conflict with both the letter and spirit of the Agreement. Within a few months of Guyana's independence, in an evident exercise of its vastly superior military capability, and obviously in an attempt to intimidate the vulnerable new nation, Venezuela seized and occupied a small portion of the country's territory. This was the Guyana half of Ankoko island which had historically been an integral part of its territorial expanse. This forcible seizure of territory was not merely an exercise of overwhelming power and an indicator of the ultimate lengths to which Venezuela was prepared to go, but stood as a constant reminder in subsequent years of Guyana's stark vulnerability, from the military standpoint.

The following year, 1967, was to see the exploitation by Venezuela of an important weakness in Guyana to seek to subvert the loyalty of its indigenous population. Several factors made them at the time a potential source of subversion. There was the fact of their generally distant geographic location in the nation's hinterland and, as well, the fact that historically they were the least integrated of its ethnic groups. Moreover, they were also exceedingly disadvantaged from the economic point of view. From the Venezuelan outlook, they were seen as susceptible to mischief-making and its Guyana-based diplomatic personnel went into action to seek to undermine the national allegiance of sections of the Amerindian population. The Guyana reaction was to take the severe step of declaring the involved diplomatic officer "persona non grata".

It was during 1968 and 1969, however, that the Venezuelan threat presented the gravest dangers to Guyana's security. Several major developments either directly undertaken by Venezuela or instigated by it were to serve to intensify the sense of danger and crisis among the Guyanese population.

First, the Venezuelan government placed an advertisement in the *London Times* of 15 June 1968 in which it basically warned off potential interested foreign investors against getting involved in investment activities in the territory under claim. This act of economic aggression recalled the similar action that it had taken in 1965, to which earlier reference was made. It had both

immediate and longer-term consequences for the country's economic development prospects since for some time into the future it represented Venezuela's disposition on the issue. The government's economic perspectives have consistently included the exploitation of the extensive agricultural, mineral and hydropower resources of this region and especially with respect to the last two, that exploitation was premised on the injection of significant external investment.<sup>33</sup>

Venezuelan pressure went up a notch almost immediately after this with President Leoni's promulgation in July of a decree, the purport of which was to seek to extend his country's sovereignty over maritime areas that legally fell within Guyana's jurisdiction. It was another practical effort at the creeping encroachment by Venezuela over the claimed territory. That decree in fact not only engendered a pervasive sense of national crisis, but critically it catalysed Burnham's two-pronged strategy of national cohesion on the issue and an aggressive diplomacy aimed at safeguarding the nation's territorial integrity.

Domestically, Burnham engaged a ready and willing PPP through a process of consultations with Jagan on the Venezuelan threat that ultimately worked to forge a cohesive national response. It entailed a political unity of forces involving the main political parties - PNC, PPP, UF - which unanimously agreed to a resolution on 17 July, condemning Venezuela's action.<sup>34</sup> This was reinforced by an outpouring of supportive declarations and actions by a range of interest groups in the society, covering the trade union movement, the Church, the media and other civil society groups.<sup>35</sup> A sense of coherent national purpose and resolve was the palpable outcome.

The domestic response was paralleled by a broad-based diplomatic mobilisation that had several elements. These were (i) the briefing by Burnham of Ambassadors based in Guyana from Germany, Canada, India, US, UK and Trinidad<sup>36</sup>; (ii) the eliciting of support from Caribbean countries; (iii) the emergence of Brazil as a crucial ingredient of Guyana's diplomacy vis-a-vis Venezuela; (iv) a demarche on the US; (v) canvassing of support within - and the sensitising of - key sectors in the United Nations and (vi) the involvement of the Commonwealth.

At the centre of this diplomacy was Burnham himself. He embarked on a range of diplomatic activities in the Caribbean, the US and UN and within the Commonwealth to garner support for Guyana. His visit to the UN shortly after the decree was made public aimed at sensitising key regional groups and the Secretary-General about the issue. His efforts were buttressed by those of Minister of State Ramphal and his UN Ambassador in a series of intensive briefings of UN diplomats and groups. Burnham also visited Washington to meet with President Johnson on the issue. At the regional level, Barbados and Trinidad via their Prime Ministers came down firmly in public statements on



the side of Guyana, with Prime Minister Barrow being exceedingly critical of Venezuela's behaviour.<sup>37</sup>

Of fundamental importance in Guyana's emergent security diplomacy was Brazil's stance on the issue. In its official statement on the matter, the Brazilian government through its Foreign Minister reaffirmed "its traditional position in respect of the inviolability of treaties and the faithful compliances with international settlement".<sup>38</sup> The clear diplomatic import of that official statement was the indication that it provided of support for Guyana's position in the controversy with Venezuela. Brazil thereafter emerged as a vital element in Guyana's multifaceted security diplomacy.

The escalating series of Venezuelan provocations in the mid- to late 1960s probably reached their high point with that country's clear involvement in the short-lived armed secessionist attempt undertaken by a small group of hinterland-based Guyanese nationals at the beginning of 1969. While the revolt was swiftly and firmly put down by Guyana's security forces, Venezuelan complicity emerged as the central point of controversy and once again galvanised universal condemnation within Guyana, involving the broadest range of interest groups.<sup>39</sup>

Reinforcing the sense of security crisis created by these episodes of Venezuela's aggression against the new nation was the series of additional acts initiated by that country with regard to Guyana's involvement in various multilateral arrangements. Guyana was thus excluded from participation in two key regional institutions, the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the IDB as a result of the Venezuelan claim. Exclusion from the IDB meant that a significant source of external funding for development purposes was foreclosed to Guyana at a time when every potential source of financing was absolutely critical.

Guyana also found itself excluded in 1967 from the important regional legal instrument, the "Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America" because of an exclusion clause in the Treaty targeted to it and Belize.<sup>40</sup> Hemispheric countries such as Barbados, Jamaica and Canada recorded strong support for Guyana in relation to its exclusion from this treaty. This diplomatic support was particularly notable with respect to the Caribbean states of Barbados and Jamaica in that it was their Prime Ministers - Shearer and Barrow - who publicly took these positions in their statements before the UN General Assembly.<sup>41</sup>

The Commonwealth emerged as another important institutional focus for Guyana in the formulation and implementation of its multifaceted security diplomacy. The biennially-held Summits provide a comfortable milieu of diplomatic interaction for Commonwealth heads of government. By virtue of its working methods and the periodicity of its meetings, it is an operating context

that is tailor-made for the forging of easy and lasting inter-personal relations between and among the participating Heads.

Since his attendance for the first time at a Commonwealth Summit - in London in 1966 - Burnham was generally unfailing in his attendance, with the exception of the 1977 and 1979 Summits in London and Lusaka, respectively. It was at these relatively cosy gatherings that he formed extremely strong friendships with several of his peers, including Presidents Nyerere and Kaunda from Tanzania and Zambia, respectively, even as he cemented past friendships, as with President Seretse Khama of Botswana. The quite excellent personal relationship that he developed with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India deserves special mention in this regard.<sup>42</sup> These relationships were undoubtedly translated into the assurance of unreserved diplomatic and political support for Guyana in the Commonwealth - and beyond - in its moments of gravest dangers in relation to Venezuela.

It is interesting that Guyana's participation at the 1966 London Commonwealth Summit coincided with one of those moments of crisis that Heads were repeatedly required to confront with regard to issues of African liberation and racial oppression - the issues of Rhodesia, Namibia and apartheid South Africa - into the 1980s. The specific issue was Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) in 1965. Guyana had taken an uncompromising and tough position on this matter.<sup>43</sup> Burnham was forthright in stating Guyana's support for the African position at the Summit, presaging its frontal and activist role in such issues in the period ahead. It should be remembered that the Commonwealth was the forum where the most intense debate of, and negotiations on, issues of African liberation and apartheid, involving various British Prime Ministers and African leaders, took place. Burnham and Guyana were the Caribbean leader and country that emerged in these early years as firm allies of African Commonwealth countries in these debates and negotiations.<sup>44</sup>

The building of these foundations of political support at the Commonwealth was to serve Guyana in good stead at the 1969 London Summit. It is to be recalled that the Summit convened in a context that was notably threatening for Guyana in the wake of Venezuela's aggressive actions - the Leoni Decree and that country's involvement in the Rupununi secessionist attempt at the start of 1969. Commonwealth Heads extended firm diplomatic support for Guyana, stating their concern and sympathy at "the difficulties which Guyana was experiencing in connection with Venezuela's claim to more than one-half of Guyana's territory. Acknowledging that threats to the territorial integrity of the state make inevitable the diversion of resources and energies from the constructive tasks of development, many members shared the view advanced by Guyana's Prime Minister that there was an urgent need for an inter-



national effort to secure the territorial integrity of every state - and especially of the small developing countries of the world".<sup>45</sup> Thereafter, the Commonwealth remained another forum of active and successful diplomacy for Guyana, linking with CARICOM, the UN and, from the beginning of the 1970s, the Non-Aligned Movement, to represent expanding circles of diplomatic activity and an emergent internationalist vision for the country's functioning at the international level in pursuit of its national interests.<sup>46</sup>

As was the case with Venezuela, Suriname emerged as a central focus of Guyana's diplomacy and security concern in the second half of the 1960s. While the security threat posed by Suriname was not of the same degree of severity as that of Venezuela and, in fact, proved to be more easily manageable within the context of the country's security capabilities, the fact that Guyana had to contend with both threats virtually simultaneously and at its most vulnerable and least prepared stage diplomatically created a sense of pervasive crisis and the image of a nation under constant siege in this period.

The early effort at forging a frontier diplomacy in relation to Suriname was reflected in Burnham's visit to Paramaribo a year after his assumption of office. This visit which was in response to the invitation extended by Prime Minister Pengel took place in January 1966 and aimed at exploring closer ties between the two countries. The summit meeting reached agreement on the procedures to deal with the frontier problem and on the mechanism of Working Groups of officials for the joint handling of common problems, including air, sea and road transport and economic cooperation matters. This was followed by the holding in June 1966 in London of tripartite talks involving the governments of Guyana, the Netherlands and Suriname on the frontier issue. These talks adjourned with the clear understanding that further talks would have been held in the period ahead. Unfortunately, despite Guyana's efforts, Suriname was not disposed in the following years to engage in the envisaged discussions.

However, late 1967 was to see the first direct episode of confrontation between the two countries when the Guyanese police authorities were called upon to undertake action to expel a Surinamese government survey team that was discovered operating in the New River Triangle, the territory claimed by Suriname. As stated by Minister Ramphal at the time, the government's position was firm and uncompromising in relation to Guyana's sovereign rights over the territory: "It is incontrovertible that the New River Triangle has always been within the boundaries of Guyana and under the sovereignty of our Government, and this has been repeatedly acknowledged to be so by the Government of the Netherlands."<sup>46</sup> The police action was thus no more than an exercise of that sovereign right in the face of a deliberate act of provocation by Suriname.

Guyana/Suriname relations rapidly degenerated following the latter's reaction to this assertion by Guyana of its control over the New River Triangle. Suriname's Prime Minister responded first by threatening the use of force against Guyana to give effect to its territorial claim.<sup>47</sup> He also announced his government's intention to expel Guyanese living in Suriname.<sup>48</sup>

By far, the more serious of Pengel's two threats was the latter. As Burnham noted, in reaction to the former, "That we can contain the Surinamers, we have no doubt".<sup>49</sup> If, as was previously seen, the military option for Guyana as a defensive measure was realistically foreclosed with regard to Venezuela, the exact opposite was the case insofar as Suriname was concerned.

But Pengel's threat to expel Guyanese living in Suriname was a matter of far more serious consequence. In announcing his government's decision, he stated that it was "decided to order all Guyanese to leave the country within a period to be set by the Government".<sup>50</sup> The new nation faced the difficult responsibility, were the threat to be enforced, of having, first, to meet the relocation requirements of several hundreds of Guyanese families in a situation of severe resource constraints and, second, to facilitate their reintegration into an economy already under critical strain. The seriousness with which the threat was received could be gleaned by the extensive domestic reaction that it engendered.

At the official level, Minister Ramphal stated in explicit terms the Guyana position thus: "The Government have noted with concern Mr. Pengel's threats to expel from Suriname innocent Guyanese citizens who have been lawfully living there and who are in no way involved in the present controversy. Such arbitrary action violates all accepted standards of international behaviour and is a clear transgression of international law...Meanwhile, let us remind the Suriname Government that if action of the kind that has been threatened is in fact taken it cannot but do serious injury to future relations between our Governments and leave a legacy of bitterness between our peoples."<sup>51</sup> As in the Venezuela case, Suriname's behaviour galvanised a national cohesiveness of purpose in face of this external threat. The major opposition party, through the person of its leader, Dr. Jagan, expressed its clear support for the government's handling of the threat<sup>52</sup> and roundly condemned the aggressive intent of the Surinamese authorities. This meant that all domestic political forces were at one in responding to Suriname. National cohesion was effectively mirrored in the page one comment of one of Guyana's major daily newspapers, the *Guyana Graphic*, which noted that:

Our Government, as befitting its democratic character, continues to act responsibly and with dignity. But when Prime Minister Burnham said that Guyana was prepared, he meant that the nation was ready to repel aggression.<sup>53</sup>



Guyana/Suriname relations took another turn for the worse during 1969 when the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) was called upon to engage Surinamese military personnel in defence of the nation's territorial integrity. The occasion for this decisive military action was the discovery of Suriname's attempt to implant military installations in the New River Triangle.

These evolving and troubling developments in Guyana/Suriname relations placed an urgent premium on the issue of practical diplomatic representation, bearing in mind the continued colonial status of Suriname. It was against this background that Guyana decided on the establishment of a diplomatic presence in Paramaribo in May 1969, involving the setting-up of a Consulate-General that became operational in June of that year.

In this stage of the incipient formation of its multi-pronged security diplomacy, the Guyana diplomatic leadership soon placed Brazil in a central role in this regard. As the main regional power on the South American sub-continent, Brazil was evidently seen as having a geo-strategic stature that could serve influentially to minimise Venezuelan aggressive intent against the young, relatively defenceless nation. In fact, it is significant that Guyana-Brazil bilateral relations effectively got off the ground in the very year, 1968, of Guyana's highest sense of insecurity and threat emanating from Venezuela.

Undoubtedly, the official release made by Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 27 July 1968 on the matter of Guyana-Venezuela relations signified a new diplomatic development of some significance for Guyana. The key element of that release was the following statement: "The Brazilian Government has been informed in detail about the various aspects which are involved in the question and wishes to re-affirm its traditional position of respect for the inviolability of Treaties and the loyal fulfilment of International Agreements."<sup>54</sup> It was clearly read as an implicit statement of support for the Guyana position. It immediately spurred the active search by the Guyanese diplomatic leadership for the development of strong and meaningful relations with the Brazilian state.

1968 was thus to see a series of initiatives involving these two countries that resulted in the rapid development of their bilateral relations. Significantly, in the immediate wake of the statement on Guyana-Venezuela relations, Brazil indicated its interest in establishing an embassy in Georgetown on the basis of the formalisation of diplomatic relations with Guyana.<sup>55</sup> Formal diplomatic relations were established later in 1968. Before this, however, Guyana quickly responded to the Brazilian diplomatic signal of support by sending a high-level governmental delegation to that country in late August 1968 to begin the process of setting the foundations for meaningful bilateral relations. Leading that delegation was Deputy Prime Minister Reid and its high-powered nature was also reflected in the fact that it included three senior Cabinet Ministers -

Ramphal as Minister of State with responsibility for Foreign Affairs, Martin Carter, the Minister of Information and Culture and Hilbert Spence, the Minister of Trade.

The main practical outcome of the visit was the conclusion of a Cultural Agreement on 28 August between the two countries. In Ramphal's words, it "represented the first step in the forging of closer links between Brazil and Guyana through the inter-change of cultural activities".<sup>56</sup> The Agreement envisaged cooperation in various areas, including higher education and the exchange of cultural and information material.

It is evident that this visit did in fact pave the way for the intensification of relations in the period immediately thereafter. Brazil set up an embassy in Georgetown in November 1968. Ramphal paid an official follow-up visit to Brazil in August 1969, during the course of which he announced that the Guyana government had taken the decision to set up an embassy in Brazil. Following on that visit, a programme of technical cooperation ensued, allowing Guyanese officials and experts to visit Brazil for various types of exposure and training. It was in this context that military cooperation began, involving the training of two senior GDF officers in October 1969 in a Jungle Warfare course in Brazil. Capping this early period of the development of bilateral relations was the presentation of her credentials by Guyana's first Ambassador to Brazil, Dr. Ann Jardim, in November 1969.

However, for Guyana, the playing of the Brazilian card presented its own difficulties. Brazil was governed by a military regime that was virulently anti-communist. Kirton has argued that, in the framework of the global East-West conflict of the moment, Brazil had assumed what he termed a "sub-imperialist role",<sup>57</sup> linked to the broader US geo-strategic interests in actively fighting communist infiltration in the region. Insofar as Brazil was seen as a vital part of Guyana's security diplomacy, this factor naturally placed limits on the Burnham government's operating room externally, and more precisely vis-à-vis the communist world.<sup>58</sup> For Jagan, therefore, the growing ties between Guyana and Brazil was a cause of deep displeasure since the latter was "a country with a fascist military regime and the main bastion of US imperialism in Latin America".<sup>59</sup>

For a government that was primordialially concerned at this time with pure survival rather than ideological correctness and imperatives, from a leftist point of view, the latter factor was of far less importance in its assessment of the balance of diplomatic advantage in seeking to form a strategic relationship with Brazil. What was of far greater importance was the fact that Brazil could bring to bear vital assets in the event that the Venezuelan threat materialised. In this view, the cold calculation of Guyana's leadership was that Brazil stood as a potential countervailing force against Venezuela's territorial ambitions.



## Guyana and regional integration

It should be recalled that Guyana had remained aloof from the coherent effort at regional integration in the English-speaking Caribbean in the second half of the 1950s. Guyana did not participate in the ultimately failed attempt at West Indies Federation in 1958-62. It is to be further recalled that the federal attempt had demonstrated the diametrically opposed positions of Jagan and Burnham on the issue of Caribbean integration.

When the issue of Guyana's participation in the federation came up for internal debate in the PPP in 1956, Jagan's position was against the country's involvement. In his analysis of the disposition of forces on the issue in Guyana, he noted that among the sectors that were supportive of Federation were the native capitalists, the middle class and its backbone, the civil service and parts of the African working class.<sup>60</sup> But, he pointedly concluded that "[t]he Indians, feeling as they do a sense of national oppression, are almost 100% opposed to Federation. This is why the Indian native capitalists who predominate in the Junior Chamber of Commerce, go against their class interests and oppose federation. The Indian capitalist up to this stage puts his 'national' interests before his 'class' interests."<sup>61</sup> On the basis of this analysis and in answering the question of the country's participation in the West Indies Federation, Jagan posed the following question: "Is it opportunism to safe guard the life of the Party, the leader of the liberation movement in Guyana and the only Caribbean working class led party with mass following."<sup>62</sup> It is evident that the crucial factor of racial calculations played a decisive role in Jagan's decision.

In an extended response to Jagan's position, Kwayana found the "profoundly racial analysis on the situation...nauseating."<sup>63</sup> On this vital issue, Jagan's usual class-based advocacy was subordinated to the expediency of the ethnic interests of his core political supporters. For Jagan, this was nothing exceptional. When the situation dictated it, he was no less the politician of expediency.<sup>64</sup>

In practical terms, moreover, his disposition toward Caribbean integration was reflected in the decision to set up a Guyana University, with evident implications for his commitment to the consolidation and strengthening of the relatively young regional UWI.<sup>65</sup> In an assessment in 1965 of his initiative to use the Conference of Heads of Caribbean governments as a crucial building-block for a renewed effort at Caribbean integration, Prime Minister Williams made this telling indictment of the PPP government on the issue of regionalism:

But the limitations of the Conference and its fundamental weakness were shown up on the question of British Guiana when it proved

impossible for Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago...to persuade British Guiana really and positively to join in any common front in the West Indies to salvage West Indian interests and to promote West Indian regional action on common issues.<sup>66</sup>

Even after the coming into being of economic regionalism in 1968, Jagan was to turn out to be one of its harshest and most persistent critics.

Burnham, on the other hand, saw Guyana's destiny as inextricably linked to that of the English-speaking Caribbean. He was vociferously supportive of the country's participation in the Federation. Regional integration thus emerged as one of the primary definitive features of Guyana's foreign policy.

Virtually immediately on his assumption of governmental office in December 1964, Burnham seized the initiative in reactivating the regional integration idea. In a real sense, Burnham was a historically fortuitous figure in relation to regionalism in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The Federation had collapsed a mere two years previously in deeply acrimonious circumstances. The Caribbean leaders of the time were severely suspicious of each other as they pointed fingers, attributing blame for the failure of Federation. It is interesting that in the aftermath of the Federation's demise, Eric Williams persistently championed the integration idea, but up to 1965, it still remained an aspiration. Williams was too tainted a figure to play the historical role of reginalvinising the Caribbean territories.

In these circumstances, any new initiative at regionalism required a political leader or political leaders - if not a country - that had not been tainted by involvement in the federal experiment. Burnham and Barrow - and significantly Guyana - were to be those leaders and that country, respectively.<sup>67</sup> The close friendship that these two leaders had forged during their student days in London undoubtedly contributed to their affinity and the ease of their decision making on this issue.

Shortly after taking office in December 1964, the Guyana government took the initiative to have the Caribbean countries agree to its hosting of the 1965 Caribbean heads of government conference, which had previously been scheduled to be held in Barbados. The idea of an annual Caribbean summit was a Williams' idea on behalf of keeping alive a common Caribbean purpose and identity. This Guyana initiative spoke volumes regarding the primacy of the Caribbean to it and was the most tangible intimation of Guyana's outlook on its relations with Caribbean countries. In the event, the conference convened in Georgetown in March 1965. Interestingly, Williams himself did not attend the conference, prefiguring a sense of uneasy Guyana-Trinidad, and more pointedly Burnham-Williams, relations in the period ahead.

Burnham took the opportunity of this event to initiate exploratory discussions with Barrow on the need for some form of intensified Guyana-Barbados



economic cooperation within the context of the search for wider regional co-operation, resulting in some preliminary understandings in this regard. In commenting on Guyana's hosting of the conference, Burnham assessed that:

Not only did it indicate that Guyana was capable of playing its proper role in the Region, but out of it came positive decisions calculated to make Regional Co-operation and unity a fact. In the spirit of this Conference, within the last week, the Governments of Guyana and Barbados have agreed to set up a Free Trade Area as between these two countries and to work towards the eventual establishment of an economic community and a customs union.<sup>68</sup>

In this sense, both symbolically and practically, Georgetown became indelibly identified with integration.

This initiative catalysed a series of intense negotiations and discussions initially involving Guyana and Barbados and later extending to Antigua and Barbuda (hereinafter Antigua). Barbados, Guyana and Antigua were the setting for a series of meetings in the nine-month period between March and December 1965, involving Burnham, Barrow and Bird. In the Burnham-Barrow meeting on 3-4 July, the Communiqué not only announced the agreement regarding the setting up of a free trade area to become operational by 1 January 1966, but critically it indicated that other Caribbean countries were welcome to participate. By the time of the next summit level meeting in Guyana in October 1965, Antigua was on board and St. Vincent had evinced interest, as evidenced by the presence of a delegation from that country, led by its Minister of Trade, at this meeting. December saw the Antigua meeting of the three leaders that culminated in the signing of the Caribbean Free Trade (CARIFTA) agreement. Regional integration was once again on the agenda of the Caribbean governments and peoples.

It should nevertheless be stressed that the initial Burnham-Barrow explorations were not without their detractors and critics. Jagan himself scathingly dismissed the Guyana-Barbados aspiration as "a joke" and in his usual charge saw in it "the hand of the imperialists at work".<sup>69</sup> Within the Caribbean, one heard talk of the seeming effrontery of two colonies on their own deciding to try regional co-operation.<sup>70</sup> In fact, Burnham was constrained to publicly debunk both the domestic and regional critics when he asserted that the trade agreement between Guyana and Barbados represented "a decolonisation of attitudes in the two countries from the colonial mentality".<sup>71</sup> He further stated that:

Some colonial reactions by our neighbours to this decision by Barbados and British Guiana are that the two countries are not yet independent and should not form an agreement between themselves, but you are what you think you are and how you behave.

The attitude of British Guiana and Barbados mainly proves that these two territories qualified for independence before those that got theirs first.<sup>72</sup>

This was a telling commentary on the only independent countries in the sub-region - Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. A period of strained relations at the leadership level between Trinidad and Guyana ensued - a fact that was not going to make it easy to widen participation in the effort. As Arthur Lewis noted in "The Agony of the Eight", Burnham and Williams not only were not talking to each other, but what he termed their competition on regionalism made it difficult to carry forward the project in terms of the ideal goal of the broadest possible participation in it.

However, the steadfastness and seriousness of Burnham, Barrow and Bird were not easily sidetracked. Their December 1965 agreement created its own dynamic which was not going to be easily reversed. They themselves prudently understood the necessity to delay the implementation of CARIFTA to pursue negotiations with other interested Caribbean countries. Importantly, moreover, the June 1966 Barbados summit of Caribbean leaders provided the occasion for Burnham and Williams to arrive at a *modus vivendi*, what was seen as a "political reconciliation" that could only have served to improve the broader negotiating context among the interested Caribbean countries.

Apart from the wise decision of the original three, Barrow, Burnham and Bird, to delay implementation of the CARIFTA agreement in pursuance of the involvement of other Caribbean countries, several important developments occurred in the post-1966 summit period. At the governmental policy level, Ramphal assumed a key role in sensitising and selling the integration project to various sectors of the wider Caribbean public. He became an eloquent and indefatigable advocate of economic regionalism in the Caribbean.<sup>73</sup>

A Caribbean business mission embarked on a tour of the region to explore the free trade issue. As Payne noted, "[d]uring the tour it emerged that Burnham was the most widely acceptable leader to act as convenor of the Special Summit Conference, and that the consensus of opinion favoured the holding of a preliminary gathering of economic advisers to consider the available options and prepare recommendations. Burnham accepted the role thereby thrust upon him and undertook to call both meetings as soon as possible".<sup>74</sup> In this regard, the Caribbean leaders also drew in the UWI academic community to undertake a series of studies on the regional economic integration process. This was followed by the holding of a conference of officials in Guyana in August 1967 to undertake a thorough examination of the prospects for Commonwealth Caribbean regional integration. The crucial output of that Conference was the elaboration of the details of a comprehensive blueprint for such a project.